

## INDONESIA'S COMMERCIAL DIPLOMACY STRATEGY IMPLEMENTED BY THE INDONESIAN EMBASSY IN TOKYO (KBRI TOKYO) IN JAPAN, 2020-2023

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### Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic since 2020 disrupted global economic activities, including trade relations between Indonesia and Japan. In 2023, Indonesia recorded a significant recovery, with export volume growth exceeding 5%, reflecting the success of national strategies supported by commercial diplomacy. Japan, as a key strategic partner in East Asia, contributed through cooperation in trade, investment, and the creative industries. This study, entitled "Indonesia's Commercial Diplomacy Strategy by the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia (KBRI) in Tokyo, 2020-2023", examines the strategies and implementation of commercial diplomacy conducted by KBRI Tokyo to advance Indonesia's economic interests during the pandemic and post-pandemic period. The research employs a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach with illustrative methods, focusing on activities such as export promotion, trade fairs, and business matching facilitation. The findings indicate that KBRI Tokyo adopted adaptive strategies by optimizing digital promotion and strengthening sustainable investment cooperation, despite challenges related to product standards and regulatory barriers.

**Keywords:** Commercial Diplomacy, Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo, Economic Strategy, Indonesia-Japan Relations, Relative Gain, COVID-19 and Economic Recovery.

## STRATEGI DIPLOMASI KOMERSIAL INDONESIA YANG DITERAPKAN OLEH KEDUTAAN BESAR RI TOKYO (KBRI TOKYO) DI JEPANG, 2020-2023

*Pandemi COVID-19 sejak 2020 mengganggu aktivitas ekonomi global, termasuk hubungan perdagangan antara Indonesia dan Jepang. Pada tahun 2023, Indonesia mencatatkan pemulihan yang signifikan, dengan pertumbuhan volume ekspor melebihi 5%, yang mencerminkan keberhasilan strategi nasional yang didukung oleh diplomasi komersial. Jepang, sebagai mitra strategis utama di Asia Timur, berkontribusi melalui kerja sama dalam perdagangan, investasi, dan industri kreatif. Studi yang berjudul "Indonesia's Commercial Diplomacy Strategy by the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia (KBRI) in Tokyo, 2020-2023" ini mengkaji strategi dan implementasi diplomasi komersial yang dilakukan KBRI Tokyo untuk memajukan kepentingan ekonomi Indonesia selama masa pandemi dan pasca pandemi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif-analitis kualitatif dengan metode ilustratif, dengan fokus pada kegiatan seperti promosi ekspor, pameran dagang, dan fasilitasi pencocokan bisnis. Temuan tersebut menunjukkan bahwa KBRI Tokyo mengadopsi strategi adaptif dengan mengoptimalkan promosi digital dan memperkuat kerja sama investasi berkelanjutan, meskipun ada tantangan terkait standar produk dan hambatan regulasi.*

**Kata kunci:** Diplomasi Komersial, KBRI Tokyo, Strategi Ekonomi, Hubungan Indonesia-Jepang, Keuntungan Relatif, COVID-19 dan Pemulihan Ekonomi.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

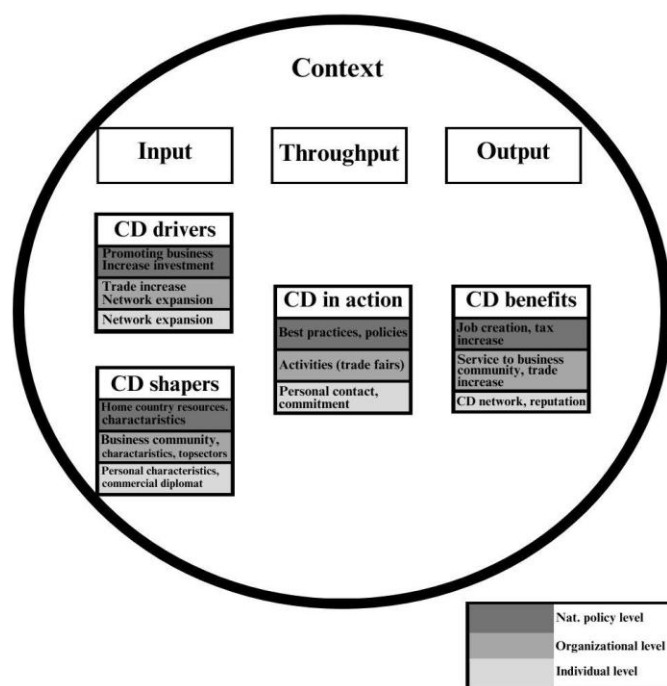
The COVID-19 pandemic that struck the world in early 2020 had a significant impact on Indonesia's economy. Indonesia's economic growth in the second quarter of 2020 was recorded at -5.32 percent according to Statistics Indonesia (BPS), marking the country's first recession since the 1998 crisis. This slowdown was also reflected in the decline of foreign investment and the increase in unemployment, which rose from 5.28 percent in 2019 to 7.07 percent in 2020. These conditions demonstrate the vulnerability of the national economy to global shocks.

However, by 2023, Indonesia had managed to demonstrate a strong economic recovery. National economic growth reached 5.05 percent throughout 2023, with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at current prices amounting to IDR 20,892.4 trillion. This recovery was supported not only by fiscal and monetary policies, but also by economic diplomacy conducted with various partner countries. Japan, as one of Indonesia's main strategic partners in East Asia, played an important role in supporting this recovery.

Data from the Ministry of Finance indicate that Indonesia's trade balance in 2023 remained in surplus at USD 36.93 billion, despite the moderation of global commodity prices. Japan was one of the key contributors to maintaining this surplus. Publications by Statistics Indonesia on foreign trade also recorded an increase in the volume of Indonesia's exports to Japan in 2023. This situation raises an academic question regarding the factors driving the increase in exports.

One factor that merits examination is the commercial diplomacy strategy implemented by the Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo (KBRI Tokyo). Since the pandemic period, KBRI Tokyo has optimized digital promotion, organized hybrid trade exhibitions, and facilitated business matching between Indonesian and Japanese business actors. This strategy has functioned not only as a recovery effort, but has also generated relative gains for Indonesia, namely advantages compared to competing countries in the region such as Vietnam and Thailand.

To analyze the effectiveness of this strategy, this study employs the commercial diplomacy framework proposed by Reuvers and Ruel (2012). Reuvers and Ruel argue that commercial diplomacy involves the use of diplomatic instruments to support the expansion of foreign economic activities, particularly in the form of export promotion and foreign direct investment (FDI). The primary objectives of such activities are to achieve economic stability, enhance national welfare, and strengthen a country's competitiveness at the global level. Furthermore, Reuvers and Ruel (2012) formulate an analytical model known as the conversion framework, which conceptualizes commercial diplomacy as a relationship between inputs, diplomatic processes, and the resulting outputs, as illustrated in the following diagram.



**Figure 1. Conversion Framework of Commercial Diplomacy by Reuvers and Ruel**  
Source: Reuvers & Ruel, 2012

The commercial diplomacy activities formulated by Reuvers and Ruel include Network Activities, Intelligence, Image Campaigns, and Business Support. These four activities indicate that commercial diplomacy is not solely oriented toward economic transactions, but also toward the creation of an ecosystem that supports the sustainability of trade and investment relations, while simultaneously strengthening a country's relative gains in global competition.

Accordingly, this study focuses on analyzing the commercial diplomacy strategy of the Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo (KBRI Tokyo) during the 2020–2023 period in promoting Indonesia's economic interests. This research adopts a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach with an illustrative method to examine concrete examples of commercial diplomacy activities and to link them to the increase in Indonesia's export volume to Japan. The findings of this study are expected to provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of commercial diplomacy as an instrument for post-pandemic economic recovery, as well as a strategy for enhancing Indonesia's competitiveness in the international market.

## 2. METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical research design. In the context of this research, the descriptive approach is employed to describe and analyze the commercial diplomacy strategies implemented by the Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo (KBRI Tokyo) during the 2020–2023 period. Accordingly, this study focuses on Indonesia's commercial diplomacy strategies as carried out by KBRI Tokyo in Japan between 2020 and 2023. KBRI Tokyo serves as the primary object of analysis as the implementing actor of Indonesia's commercial diplomacy in Japan, playing a key role in facilitating bilateral economic relations between the two countries. This research relies entirely on secondary data in analyzing Indonesia's commercial diplomacy strategies implemented by KBRI Tokyo in Japan. Secondary data are defined as data obtained by the researcher from existing sources, such as reports, academic journals, books, and official documents. (Sugiyono, 2017).

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

#### **Indonesia's Commercial Diplomacy Strategy Implemented by The Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo (KBRI Tokyo) in Japan, 2020–2023**

According to Reuvers and Ruel (2012), commercial diplomacy refers to the use of diplomatic instruments as tools to enhance commercial activities, including export activities and the promotion of foreign direct investment (FDI). The concept of commercial diplomacy proposed by Reuvers and Ruel identifies four main categories of activities that can be undertaken by diplomatic missions. These four categories form a comprehensive framework that enables a systematic analysis of various forms of diplomatic intervention in supporting national economic interests.

#### **Input Factors of Indonesia's Commercial Diplomacy by KBRI Tokyo**

In the conceptual framework of commercial diplomacy developed by Reuvers and Ruel (2014), the input component consists of drivers and shapers that shape a country's commercial diplomacy activities.

##### **Drivers**

Based on the analysis of Indonesia's commercial diplomacy activities conducted by KBRI Tokyo during the 2020–2023 period, the researcher identified four main factors that serve as drivers in shaping Indonesia's commercial diplomacy objectives in Japan. The first factor is the dynamics of Indonesia's export and import capacities in the context of post-COVID-19 economic recovery. The second factor is the perceptions and expectations of Indonesian and Japanese business communities toward one another. The third factor is the characteristics of Indonesia's natural resources and flagship products, which possess strategic potential to enter the Japanese market. The fourth factor is the structural conditions of bilateral economic relations between the two countries, which provide opportunities for the development of trade cooperation.

##### **Shapers**

We identified four main factors that serve as shapers, namely the policies and directives of the Indonesian government, the institutional capacity of KBRI Tokyo, the bilateral political and diplomatic context, and external and strategic environmental factors. The policies of the Indonesian government serve as the primary shaper, determining the direction and priorities of KBRI Tokyo's commercial diplomacy. Directives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through the Directorate General of Asia Pacific and Africa, as well as coordination with the Ministry of Trade and other technical ministries, form the operational framework of Indonesia's commercial diplomacy in Japan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). In addition to the institutional capacity of KBRI Tokyo, the political and diplomatic conditions between Indonesia and Japan also shape commercial diplomacy. The dynamics of high-level Indonesia–Japan political relations create the context and momentum for KBRI Tokyo's commercial diplomacy.

Finally, external and strategic environmental factors influence the formulation of commercial diplomacy. Global economic crises, exchange rate fluctuations, changes in international commodity prices, and global trade trends affect the strategies and priorities of commercial diplomacy activities.

#### **Throughput Factors of Indonesia's Commercial Diplomacy by KBRI Tok**

In the conceptual framework of Reuvers and Ruel (2014), throughput refers to the concrete activities and processes carried out in the implementation of commercial diplomacy. This component encompasses the various instruments, methods, and activities employed by

diplomatic missions to achieve commercial diplomacy objectives based on the inputs previously identified.

### **Diplomacy Activities: Network Activities Dimension**

Network activities are commercial diplomacy activities that focus on building and maintaining networks with various stakeholders to facilitate trade and investment relations.

In the developing business and government contacts function, KBRI Tokyo engages in lobbying or diplomatic efforts to encourage Japanese entities, including financial institutions such as JBIC, to invest in Indonesia's strategic projects.

In the state visits/ delegation function, KBRI Tokyo organizes and facilitates visits of Japanese business importers to Indonesia. For instance, KBRI Tokyo coordinated a business delegation from Japanese fruit importers to visit Indonesia on November 16 and 18, 2022. The visits included trips to plantations (e.g., mango farms in Sumedang, West Java) and business matching sessions with local exporters (Antara, 2022).

In the buyer-seller meetings function, KBRI Tokyo initiates and co-organizes events with Indonesian institutions and Japanese partners. The Indonesia Japan Virtual Business Forum (IJBF) is a virtual business forum established to strengthen trade and investment relations between Indonesia and Japan.

In the match-making function, KBRI Tokyo coordinates business actors and relevant institutions to ensure Indonesian products are showcased at Trade Expo Indonesia (TEI). The embassy also provides information on regulations and export compliance standards for the Japanese market. Additionally, KBRI Tokyo facilitates access for local exporters to the Japanese market through participation in TEI, whether via virtual or physical stands/pavilions (Antara, 2025).

In the personal network of commercial diplomats function, KBRI Tokyo participates in activities organized by the Indonesian Entrepreneurs Association in Japan (APIJ). Established on April 4, 2018, APIJ aims to strengthen and enhance friendship and economic cooperation between Indonesia and Japan.

### **Diplomacy Activities in Intelligence Dimension**

Intelligence activities involve the collection, analysis, and dissemination of strategic market information to support business decision-making and trade policy. This effort is realized through an economic dashboard designed according to the CRAT principles (Current, Reliable, Accurate, Timely). Named the Japan-Indonesia Partnership Lounge (JAIPONG), the dashboard is an initiative of KBRI Tokyo to implement a more targeted and selective commercial diplomacy strategy by leveraging digital technology (KBRI Tokyo Performance Report, 2022).

In addition to developing the JAIPONG dashboard, KBRI Tokyo, under the gathering commercial information function, also organizes investment-related webinars. Examples include the webinar "Market Access for Indonesian SME Exporters to Japan Post-COVID-19" in 2020 and the "Indonesia Investment Forum" in Tokyo in 2023.

Under the consultant to both countries function, KBRI Tokyo initiated the Indonesia Japan Virtual Business Forum (IJBF), a virtual platform aimed at strengthening economic and trade cooperation between Indonesia and Japan (Ministry of Trade, 2020).

In the image studies and joint scientific research function, KBRI Tokyo regularly monitors the development of Indonesia-Japan trade values, including trends in high-growth commodities

(e.g., tropical fruits and agricultural products), and produces comprehensive economic intelligence reports..

### **Diplomation Activity Dimensi Image Campaigns**

Image campaigns are activities aimed at building and enhancing positive perceptions of Indonesian products and the national economy among stakeholders in Japan. In this context, one form of promotional activity is trade exhibitions, which include the promotion of goods and services, participation in trade fairs, and raising awareness among potential foreign investors.

Under the promoting goods and services function, KBRI Tokyo acts as a liaison between Indonesian business actors and potential partners in Japan, such as through the organization of Virtual Trade Expo events. In addition to hosting virtual meetings, KBRI Tokyo also initiated the establishment of BITJTe. BITJTe is a joint initiative between KBRI Tokyo and Bank Indonesia (BI Tokyo) to foster collaboration between Indonesian and Japanese technopreneurs (startups/digital specialists), facilitate the promotion of Indonesian products in Japan through digital technology, and enhance digital talent through bootcamps.

Other promotional agendas include showcasing Indonesian single-origin coffee and chocolate during the Coffee with the Ambassador event at KBRI Tokyo on November 22, 2021, attended by approximately 40 participants in person, as well as participating in Trade Expo Indonesia, which serves as a key moment for establishing trade commitments through contract signing.

Furthermore, to expand the promotion of halal products, KBRI Tokyo launched a Halal Vending Machine in 2023, aimed at supporting exports and introducing Indonesian halal products to the Japanese public. In 2024, KBRI Tokyo even initiated collaborations with local governments, institutions, and associations to accelerate halal certification in Japan.

In efforts to increase Japanese investor interest in Indonesian commodities, KBRI Tokyo actively participates in several international exhibitions. Examples include Foodex 2021 and 2022 for food products, Project Tokyo for creative fashion products, International Biomass Expo for biomass products (Palm Kernel Shell), and Japan D.I.Y Homecenter Show 2022.

### **Diplomacy Activities in Business Support Dimension**

Business support activities include initiatives that provide direct assistance to Indonesian business actors in entering and competing in international markets. One of KBRI Tokyo's main programs is the establishment of the Smart and Small Medium Enterprises (SME) Center in 2021. This program aims to support the presence of Indonesian SMEs in Japan, particularly diaspora-owned SMEs, enabling them to develop and expand their businesses. The SME Center was established through collaboration with several strategic partners, including Bank Negara Indonesia (BNI) Tokyo, the Bank Indonesia (BI) Tokyo Representative Office, the Indonesia Investment Promotion Center (IIPC Tokyo), Garuda Indonesia Tokyo, and Pertamina East Asia (KBRI Tokyo, 2021).

Advocacy in halal standards is one of the program's main focuses, considering the growing halal market potential in Japan due to an increasing number of Muslim tourists and rising awareness among the Japanese public about halal products. In this regard, KBRI Tokyo collaborates with the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) and Japanese halal certification bodies to accelerate the certification of Indonesian products while building mutual recognition of halal standards.

In addition to advocacy, KBRI Tokyo conducts various capacity-building programs to enhance the competence of Indonesian business actors in navigating the Japanese market. Regular training sessions and seminars themed "Understanding Japanese Business Culture"

are organized to provide insights into business etiquette, negotiation styles, and relationship-building within Japanese business culture.

### **Results of Commercial Diplomacy Activities by KBRI Tokyo**

According to Reuvers and Ruel, the results of commercial diplomacy are divided into two categories: economic gains and political gains. Some of the benefits from the activities carried out by KBRI Tokyo are not yet fully visible, as these activities were still ongoing up to 2023. Therefore, in analyzing the results of Indonesia's commercial diplomacy by KBRI Tokyo, the researcher will focus on the outputs recorded in 2023, aligned with the activities and objectives of commercial diplomacy discussed in the previous subchapter.

In 2023, KBRI Tokyo successfully exceeded its performance targets in economic diplomacy within the trade sector. The Key Performance Indicator (KPI), namely the Effectiveness Level of Economic Diplomacy in the Trade Sector with the countries of KBRI Tokyo's accreditation, reached 117.10% of the target of 88%. When the KPI results were combined with weighted components, the overall achievement reached 144.33%, far exceeding the maximum success threshold of 120%. Simply put, these data indicate that Indonesia's economic diplomacy efforts in Japan have been highly effective.

Indonesia's positive image refers to the perceptions or beliefs held by international actors about Indonesia, which are shaped by Indonesia's patterns of behavior in global relations. Building a positive image is important for Indonesia, as it can increase international trust and strengthen Indonesia's position as a sovereign nation across various sectors.

According to Reuvers and Ruel (2014), the success of the commercial diplomacy process (throughput) heavily depends on a diplomatic mission's ability to manage various activities in an integrated and strategic manner. KBRI Tokyo has developed a comprehensive approach to implementing all four categories of commercial diplomacy activities, although there remains room for optimization in terms of coordination mechanisms, resource allocation, and impact measurement of the activities carried out.

### **Relative Gain as the Objective and Target of Indonesia's Commercial Diplomacy**

In conducting its trade diplomacy, Indonesia does not focus solely on achieving absolute economic gains but also strives to attain relative gains with its trading partners. Through KBRI Tokyo, Indonesia seeks to implement a commercial diplomacy strategy based on the principles of liberalism, which emphasize the importance of open economic cooperation, free trade, and cross-border investment. In practice, Indonesia does not stop at achieving mutual gains; it carefully measures relative gains to ensure that the benefits obtained are balanced in comparison to its partners.

For Indonesia, relative gain serves both as a desired outcome and as a strategic direction in conducting commercial diplomacy. This means that every step of economic diplomacy from negotiating trade agreements and promoting investment to opening market access is designed to ensure that national gains do not disadvantage Indonesia relative to partners such as Japan. Through this approach, commercial diplomacy is not only focused on increasing the value of economic transactions but also on creating a balance of benefits, facilitating technology transfer, and strengthening domestic industrial capacity. As a result, Indonesia can narrow the value-added gap with partner countries.

Thus, relative gain has a dual function: it is both the intended result of commercial diplomacy and the strategic direction guiding Indonesia's foreign economic policy on the global stage.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on research conducted on Indonesia's commercial diplomacy through the Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo during the 2020–2023 period, several key conclusions can be drawn that reflect the dynamics and effectiveness of Indonesia's commercial diplomacy implementation in Japan. First, the implementation of Indonesia's commercial diplomacy through the Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo has demonstrated a comprehensive approach by integrating the four dimensions of commercial diplomacy activities according to the Reuvers and Ruel (2014) framework: network activities, intelligence activities, image campaigns, and support business activities. The Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo has successfully developed a holistic strategy to facilitate Indonesia-Japan economic relations, despite the challenges posed by the global COVID-19 pandemic, which affected the dynamics of international trade.

The commercial diplomacy activities carried out by the Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo have shown two main outcomes, as stated by Reuvers and Ruel: economic gains and political gains. Based on the 2023 Key Performance Indicator (KPI) data of the Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo, Indonesia's economic diplomacy efforts in Japan have proven to be highly effective. Commercial diplomacy has also contributed to human resource development and job creation through educational and technical training cooperation, internship programs, as well as research scholarships and initiatives to enhance Indonesia's positive image in Japan.

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